

TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY

BULLETIN

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VOLUME VII

NUMBERS 3 and 4

December, 1941

THE "OLD-TIME RELIGION" AS A FOLK RELIGION

Since man was not made to live alone, his strong gregarious bent has led him to flock together with others of his kind. These flocks, formed for different purposes, have taken on forms which we call institutions, human institutions in culture. We have thus political, economic, social, religious institutions, and many others. Each human institution, like each human being, comes up and goes down, goes through its cycle of birth, youth, maturity, decline, and death; this despite all human struggle to make it everlasting. The inevitable cycle proves the wide truth of Goethe's lines:

Alles was auf Erden steht
Ist wert, dass es zugrunde geht.

Religion is probably coeval with man; but religion if defined simply as the veneration of a supreme being, can hardly be called an institution any more than we call the love of man for woman or of man for his neighbor an institution. Religion as such, then, is extraneous to our consideration. But a particular man-formulated organization for the fostering of the religious urge in mankind is quite a different thing. It is an institution; and the history of mankind shows that such institutions are subject to the life cycles of institutions as such.

The Christian Church is one of the longest-lived religious institutions; that is, if considered as a

whole along with its Jewish background. If, however, we consider Judaism, the Roman Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, Early European Protestantism, and Modern American Protestantism as distinct though related institutions, the life span of each becomes shorter and more easily observable. I shall proceed today from that point of view and shall confine my observations essentially to a period in American cultural-religious life which reaches roughly from 1740 to 1840 and within which three trends are observable. First, Early European Protestantism entered the last or death phase of its institutional life cycle; second, a non-institutional or institutionally chaotic time followed; and then, toward the close of the selected period, the beginnings of Modern American Protestantism were made. Of course I shall not hope to show these trends as absolute and clear-cut in time and place. That would be false to the facts. All I shall hope to do is to list a few symptoms of what seem to me the three general tendencies.

The condition of institutional decline in Early European Protestantism which we posited for the beginning of our selected period was observable both in Britain and the American colonies. It had been observed long before, even, both in the Anglican projection of what had been the Roman Church and in the "established" forms of Early Continental Protestant-

ism, as for example in the Established Church of Scotland and in the established Lutheran and Evangelical Churches in various European countries. Indeed, the decline in those institutions seem to have been in causal relationship to their being established, their close link-up with worldly authority. Symptoms of this decay--a cold impersonal spirit in the institution and widespread dissent among the masses--had been observable in the British Isles for a century or more before our period began. Around the middle of the 18th century the onset of the Machine Age in its early phases made matters worse; for it impoverished the masses and impelled them to hate and to try to destroy the authoritarian forces which had brought this suffering on them. Thus the natural antagonism of the masses to all authority, temporal and religious, was raised to a white heat; radically dissenting religious groups multiplied; the Great Awakening spread; and the suffering dissenters, hopeless of any improvement in their condition at home, boarded ships when they could, for the New World. Thus America became the haven of the Shaking Quakers, Sandemanians, Wesleyans, English Moravians, Baptists, and what have you, along with legions of others who had become anti-religious. These from the British Isles swelled the numbers of the other great religious-freedom immigrations from continental Europe.

But even on these shores they found the political-economic-religious cards stacked against them. In the northern colonies Early European Protestantism in the guise of the Congregational Standing Order has long since pre-empted all authority and disfranchised and dispossessed all who refused to attend their church services and to pay taxes imposed for the support of their brand of religious institution. In the Southern colonies with the Anglican Established Order in an even closer hookup, with political power, and with this partnership controlling all the good earth and good slaves, the so-called "welcome to the oppressed" was even colder. Only in the little strip of the Jerseys and eastern Pennsylvania did the poverty-stricken newcomers find anything like a fair deal. Everywhere else they had to "get regular" or take to the backwoods and the hill country.

Then came the Revolutionary War. In picturing this struggle we tend to think of it too much, I feel, as a revolt against a British king. A truer view would define it as chiefly a mass struggle of the variously dispossessed backwoodsmen against the tide-water tory magistrates and landlords; the religious outcasts against their religious oppressors. And in the winning of that war we should, I believe, give the credit chiefly to those same backwoodsmen, the real fighters with their Patrick Henry spokesmen and leaders. But, be that as it may, the war was won,

and the masses gained at least some of the freedoms for which they had ~~fought~~, and along with these the freedom to worship God according to their own consciences.

The significance of this is, I believe, generally underestimated. It appears in a truer light perhaps if we realize that it was the first instance during the entire Christian era that a folk had won and possessed full liberty in this phase of its culture, freedom not only from the authority of magistrates, princes, kings, and emperors, but also from any and all religious institutions. This meant more than we can realize to the millions of descendants of those Old-World dissenters who for centuries had carried on their struggle against religious regimentation and persecution by meeting secretly in caves, garrets, cellars, and in the woods.

Now their struggle was ended. Yorktown spelt the doom of the two "established" religious institutions--the Congregational Standing Order in New England and the Established Church in the South. They did not disappear ~~suddenly~~, of course. They have not disappeared yet. But their powers over unwilling masses were gone. The real significance of the revulsion against them is shown by the census of a hundred years later, 1890, which gives their combined memberships as but one-fourteenth of those of all American Protestant denominations, and as but

one-twentieth of American church members of all faiths, a proportion which still holds today.

Of greater significance for the subsequent religious life of the nation, and of closer pertinence to our present consideration is the post-war behavior of the religious-rebellious masses. Their consciences were free; but it quickly became apparent that these consciences were also various. Their manner of worship was free; but opinions varied greatly on the subject of manner. And, moreover, with all compulsions removed, there developed also a widespread indifference and even an antagonism to religion as such. (This was the time, it may be remembered, of Thomas Paine, the noted atheist who, significantly, was also a staunch supporter of the American Revolutionary cause.) These disintegrating factors brought about a condition which was quite chaotic, or anarchic.

It is hard to understand or describe chaos--hard to find anything in it to pin one's arguments to. In attempting to get a clearer understanding of the period I went to the church-denominational histories. There everything seemed serene; but I soon noticed that they all chronicled extraordinary denominational difficulties especially in the post-Revolutionary decades. The historians of the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians all told of erring shepherds who had led flocks of their denomination astray. Those incidents were treated as unfortunate delusions which sooner or later petered out

as was natural, since they were wrong. I became suspicious. I began to delve into the delusions and to study them from the records of the "deluded" themselves. And before long it became quite clear to me that it was precisely those who had refused to follow the straight path of denominational tradition who were the real takers-over of a live personal faith, lovers of a vigorous personal Christianity, real mass-insisters that the term "religious freedom" should mean just what it said.

I shall not take time today to go into the details of these freedom-schisms. I shall say merely that the Baptists--always exceptionally individualistic and thus separatistic--seem to have been the champion splitter-uppers, with the Freewill Baptists as perhaps their most significant early break-away; that the Methodists, toward the end of the eighteenth century, lost a powerful segment of their adherents--those who wanted more denominational rope than John Wesley had in mind when he established their rules; and that the Presbyterians, though the most conservative of all, split open three times during the period under scrutiny (in 1741, 1800, and 1837) and each time on the freedom issue.

Each denomination lost not only to its own "delusionists" but also to those breaking away

from other denominations. Leading preachers led their flocks and other preachers' flocks to give up old creeds and covenants and party names, to take on those which were new and less binding or to give up man-made creeds entirely. There are recorded instances of where one and the same congregation made two and three flocks of this sort.

The high point in this trend--the time when institutional Protestantism was at its lowest and non-institutional religious excitement was at its highest--was probably around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The most important sign of the times was the camp meeting. It was important because it represented essentially a cross section of the whole religious flux, because it was totally free--free from all political, denominational, economic and social control, direct or indirect. It was of, for, and by the people. Preachers of no denomination and every denomination were there; but, if denominational, they left their denominations behind. Their influence as preachers extended only so far as they were able to draw and hold a crowd. There was perfect equality in the camp meetings. Everybody prayed, exhorted, sang when, what, and as he pleased. The saved and the lost, believers and atheists were there. Everybody was there. It was a hundred per cent democracy--and a hundred per cent folk. Their only acknowledged

authority was God; and He was with them, working for them they were sure. It is for all these reasons that I have called the religion I have described, the religion of the American folk-- Our Folk Religion, now called in retrospect the "Old-Time Religion."

The anarchic or inorganic condition in religious matters was not destined to last long. The primal gregarious urge was already evident in the great camp meeting gatherings; and the formation of new organizations or religious institutions called churches was inevitable and began very soon. I hope to deal with these new institutions which are now called collectively Modern American Protestantism in a further treatment. For the present I shall go no further than the presentation just made of my understanding of the period of religious disorganization and dissolution, excepting that I shall state one significant and closely related conclusion.

In the last year or so I have come to the viewpoint that the flux which I have tried to understand and describe--which, in view of its characteristics, I have called the American Folk-Religion--has been the hotbed in which the great body of American religious folk-songs grew. I have concluded that what are still known as Old-Time Songs were part and parcel of the Old-Time

Religion; that they rose with it in the one to two generations after the Revolutionary War and on American soil; that they went down with it when it gave way to the New-Time Religion; that they are both dead today, at least institutionally dead; and that what we observe of them nowadays are merely relics in culture; interesting, valuable, beautiful, but merely relics of a folky and dynamic period in American religious life and American song life.

George Pullen Jackson

SOME EAST TENNESSEE PLACE NAMES

The study of the geographic nomenclature of place-names of any one particular region is a fascinating one, one that may very well be included under the title of folk-lore. In many instances the explanation is very evident. Others are more obscure, the outgrowth of some local circumstance. In the years since they were bestowed legends have grown up as to their origin or meaning, legends that investigation does not always substantiate.

For example, let us take the name of our State, Tennessee. We know that the State drew its cognomen from that of its greatest river, and that the name is of Cherokee origin. From childhood I have heard that the word in that tongue meant "Big Bend," and that it alluded to the wide sweep of the river as it turned Northward across the State. James Mooney, the great student of the Cherokee language, tells us that the meaning of the term has been long lost, but that it has done duty as the names of three separate towns of the Cherokee, one of them on the stream we now call the Little Tennessee River. As early as 1761 Henry Timberlake wrote in his Memoirs that he went by canoe down the Holston River to its junction with the Tennessee (now Little Tennessee) and up that to the towns of the Indians. So it is evident that at such early date the stream, or at least the East Tennessee portion of it, was already well known by that title. In its lower reaches it was called by the English

and French explorers the "River of the Cherokees." So we arrive at the conclusion that at first it was called, in the East, "the river that flows by Tenasi (the town)," then "Tenasi (Tennessee) River," and as adventurous souls went further and further down the stream they took the name with them, until the entire river bore a common title.

A few names of Indian origin still survive in upper East Tennessee, but they are not nearly so plentiful there as in the lower counties. This is easily accounted for when one remembers that when the white man first arrived the valleys of the Watauga, Holston, and Nolichucky Rivers were only the hunting grounds of the Cherokee, whose villages were far to the South and West. Hence there was not the frequent contact between the races that would lead to the white acquiring the Indian place names.

Prominent among the survivals are the rivers-- Watauga, Nolichucky, Hiwassee, and Tellico. The meaning of the first and last have been lost, but villages on the banks of each bore the name, though the Cherokee pronunciation was not exactly that now used.

Nolichucky was originally Nanathigunyi, or "the spruce tree place," the name of a traditional Cherokee village near the site of Jonesboro. Why it should have been applied to the river some miles away is not

clear. Hiwassee is more correctly Ayuhwasí, the name referring to the broad meadows or bottom lands along it.

Due either to his own lack of education or his feeling of superiority over the savage, the early white settler took little pains to acquire the correct pronunciation of any Indian word. His imperfect acquaintance with the language also led him into many errors. The names of twin peaks in the Great Smokies originated thus. On one of them grew great quantities of gura, a plant esteemed by the Cherokee as a spring salad. We can visualize the Indian pointing out the spot to a white friend and saying "Gura-yi," or "Greens are there," the suffix "yi" being a locative. The frontiersman assumed the word to be the name of the peak, and passed it on as such. In time it was corrupted into a two-word name, Curry He. Then some backwoods wag, literally minded and with no knowledge of its source, feeling that the ladies had been neglected, remembered them in christening another top nearby, so now we have Curry He and Curry She.

The oldest County in the State is called Washington. There is no mystery about that. When early in 1776 the settlers on the western frontier of North Carolina formed themselves into a district and asked the North Carolina Assembly to ratify their action, they chose the name of George Washington, then Commander in Chief of the Continental forces. This

was the first political sub-division honoring Washington by the appropriation of his name, and that even before the colonies had formally declared themselves independent of Great Britain.

Nor is there any more question as to the source of the name of the State's first town, Jonesboro. When the County was established in 1777 and the first rude courthouse built, the cluster of cabins that sprung up around it was first called Washington Courthouse, following a long established usage in the seaboard States. But when by legislative action a town was authorized and laid off at the site, it was christened Jonesborough, honoring Willie Jones, a prominent citizen of Halifax, North Carolina, a member of the North Carolina Assembly and a staunch friend of the settlers in the West.

The custom of naming towns, counties, and geographical features for prominent personages is ages old. Throughout East Tennessee we find it in plenty. Carter County bears the name of Col. John Carter, one of its first and most prominent settlers; Sevier County and Sevierville that of John Sevier, the beloved "Nolichucky Jack" of the frontiersmen; Knox County and Knoxville, that of General Knox, Secretary of War in Washington's Cabinet; Greene County and Greeneville, Gen. Nathaniel Greene, of Revolutionary fame; Blount

County and Blountville, Gen. William Blount, first, and only Territorial Governor. A host of other such instances might be cited.

Earliest visitors to the region were the Long Hunters, and it is only reasonable to suppose that they would call hill or stream by names with reference to game seen or killed thereabouts, or to some incident of the hunt. From this, if from no other source, we can establish the fact that certain animals, last seen many decades ago, were plentiful here at the coming of the white man. Buffalo Springs, Buffalo Creek, Buffalo Mountain, and Buffalo Ridge, all widely separated, evidence the abundance of the bison. Then we have Elk River and Elk Valley, Beaver Creek and Beaver Dam Creek, Wolf Run, Wolf Hills, and Wolf River, and many others of like type, all of them recalling animals now long gone.

Daniel Boone was among the earliest of these Long Hunters. On one of his first trips of exploration along the Watauga he was closely pursued by hostile Indians and only eluded them by wading some distance up a stream and then hiding in a cleft in the ledges beneath a waterfall. On this or a subsequent trip he killed a bear close to the same water and carved on a beech tree the legend "D. Boon cilled a bar on tree in year 1760." Those who came after him spoke first of the creek where Boone hid or hunted, then a little later simply as Boones Creek. So it remains today.

In the economic machinery of every pioneer settlement the rude water-driven grist or corn grinding mill was a very important cog, drawing its trade from miles around and serving also as a meeting place for the dissemination of the news of the neighborhood. So important was the mill considered that the right to build one on any particular stream, as well as the rates to be charged for grinding, were matters under the regulation of the County Court. Naturally, if a stream upon which such a business was carried on had no fixed name, it would be dubbed Mill Creek, or maybe with the name of the owner affixed, as Mingus Mill Creek. Pounding Mill Creek was the site of a crude water-driven pestle mill or corn-cracker. Flourville is the community that grew up about a mill for grinding wheat.

The early iron industry also depended on water as the motive power for the bellows for the furnaces and to lift the ponderous tilt-hammers used in making wrought iron. The stone furnace stacks and the iron works have long since vanished, but the memory of their presence is perpetuated in such names as Furnace Creek, Forge Creek, and Pigeon Forge. No iron has been mined in Sullivan County for generations, but one community still bears the name of Ore Bank.

The Blue Ridge and the Great Smoky Mountains both owe their names to the veil of ethereal blue

haze that hangs perpetually over them. Both names date back to about the day when white eyes first beheld them.

Some years ago I asked an aged Cherokee by what name his people called these mountains in whose shadows they had lived so long. He answered,

"Sha-cona-ga."

Pressed for a translation, he replied,

"Means blue, like smoke."

All of which leads to an interesting speculation. Did the Indians' idea influence that of the white men; was the opposite true; or did they independently arrive at the same thought?

Just as their blue color named these, so did the white quartzite cliffs and ledges of the Unakas christen them, for the Cherokee word for white is unega. The same term appears in slightly altered form as Unicoi. And the Black Mountains drew their title from the dense balsam forests covering their upper levels with black-green foliage many shades darker than the leaves of the deciduous trees below.

All over the country a host of rural communities have sprung up about the central nucleus of a church and have taken to themselves the name by which these churches have become known. In these a religious flavor predominates, sometimes derived from that of a celebrated divine, as Mt. Wesley or Asbury; a Biblical title, as Salem, Shiloh, Mt.

Carmel, Horeb, and Bethesda; or of an inspirational nature, like New Hope or Providence. All these, of course, were bestowed in accordance with the religious or poetic tastes or whims of the congregation holding services in the church.

In my home county is a community that was known far and wide as Shake Rag. For years it was the scene of colored campmeetings, dances, and other gatherings, even ante-dating the Civil War, and its name is supposed to have come from the chance remark of a spectator at a dance, seeing the negroes disporting themselves in cast-off finery.

"Watch them niggers shake them rags!"

For a long time the name stuck. Gradually these gatherings ceased, a different type of citizenry took over, and when a white church was built some years after it was christened New Victory. The transition from the old to the new has become complete and the former name is never heard now-a-days save occasionally in a jesting way by some of the old-timers.

Physical characteristics are responsible for a vast number of place names. In most instances the reason is so self-evident that no explanation is necessary. In this category will fall such as Dry Creek, Muddy Fork, Swift Branch, Sinking Creek (disappearing into a sink hole or cave rather than emptying into a larger stream), Cedar Bluff, White

Oak Flats, Bald Mountain, and a thousand others.

In the Great Smoky Mountains the place names had the opportunity of development free from the influence of outside contacts, with most interesting results. In them the daily life of the hill people is reflected, with its pathos and tragedy, its labors and its joys, in a phraseology ranging from poetic and fanciful to starkly realistic, with sometimes a tinge of robust, earthy flavor. This one section alone could furnish more than enough material for the time allotted to this paper, but only a few can now be mentioned.

Two buttressing spurs of Thunderhead bear the names of Bote Mountain and Defeat Ridge, commemorating the building of a wagon road to the top of the mountain prior to the Civil War. The route was not determined by trained engineers, as is done today, but was left to the judgment of the builders, many of whom were Cherokee Indians, speaking broken English. In their native tongue there is no sound of V and they have difficulty in framing it in English, generally substituting the sound of B. To decide along which ridge the road should ascend the mountain, a vote of the working crews was had, the will of the majority to settle it. The Cherokee were unanimous in their choice, each pointing to the westernmost of the ridges and saying "Bote," to indicate that he voted for that one. Chosen,

it was christened Bote Mountain and the other, rejected, was given the title of Defeat Ridge.

Throughout those hills we find a host of such names as Devil's Courthouse, Devil's Den, Devil's Racetrack, Devil's 'Tater Patch and the like. Invariably they have been affixed to some location more than ordinarily rough, rugged and laurel choked, where the Devil himself would have difficulty in worming his way through. The common name for an impenetrable jungle of rhododendron--laurel to the native--is "laurel hell," or simply "hell." Jeffries Hell and Huggins Hell are two examples of this, and one who has tried to penetrate their recesses will quickly agree that the title is more than justified.

In backwood's parlance one afflicted with epilepsy or similar seizures is said to be "fittified." So it is not surprising that an intermittent spring on the side of Le Conte, with its alternate periods of free flow and low water, should be called the Fittified Spring.

Pursuing a bear on the headwaters of Cosby Creek a hunter was accidentally shot and killed by his brother. The survivor was naturally grief-stricken at the occurrence and, as a native recounted it to me, "took on so they called the place Cryin' Creek."

The delver into the sources of names can be misled. Two small streams were called locally Hostility and Battle Branch. That would have all the earmarks of clan warfare and I prepared myself for a story of an early feud, but it didn't turn out that way. My informant stated that they were so named because "the country was so rough and hostile ye had to battle yer way through."

No one community or section has a monopoly on interesting or unique place names. Every region possesses them and one does not have to go far afield for the opportunity to carry on research in this fascinating branch of folklore.

Paul M. Fink

TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY BULLETIN

Volume VII Numbers 3 and 4 December, 1941

Published four times a year by the
Tennessee Folklore Society

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The 1941 Meeting

The Tennessee Folklore Society held its eighth annual meeting at the University of Tennessee on Saturday, November 15, 1941.

At the morning session four papers were presented, the first by Miss Dorothy Horne of the music faculty at Maryville College entitled "Examples of Early American Art Music in the New Harp of Columbia"; this study has already been accepted for publication in the Southern Folklore Quarterly and will appear soon in print. The second feature of the program was an address by Dr. William E. Cole, Professor of Sociology at the University of Tennessee on "Some Implications of Folk Studies in Social Planning." The third paper

was "The Old Time Religion as a Folk Religion" by Dr. George Pullen Jackson of Vanderbilt University. This paper appears as one of our two admirable leading articles in this issue of the Bulletin. The fourth offering of the morning was "Some Unrecorded Cumberland Mountain Ballads" by Professor A. M. Moser of Lincoln Memorial University at Harrogate.

In the afternoon session there were three items, first a group of Selected Folk Songs sung by Mr. Jack Moore of Knoxville; second, a paper by Mr. Paul M. Fink of Jonesboro, "Some East Tennessee Place Names." This paper appears with Dr. Jackson's as the other leading article in this issue. The final item on the program was the address by the President of the Society, Dr. Edwin C. Kirkland, of the University of Tennessee, which took the form of the presentation and discussion of a Bibliography of Tennessee Folksong. Dr. Kirkland also played for the meeting a few recordings of songs of his own collecting, notably two records of Chinese folk songs sung by a Chinese student.

The society elected as its officers for 1942, Dr. George Pullen Jackson of Nashville, president; Professor Neal Frazier of Murfreesboro, first vice-president; Dr. Susan B. Riley of Nashville, as second vice-president; Mr. Paul M. Fink of Jonesboro, as third vice-president; Dr. Edwin C. Kirkland of Knoxville as secretary and editor of the Bulletin; and

Miss Geneva Anderson of Maryville as Treasurer.

The place for the 1942 meeting is to be Cookeville. The exact date will be announced later.

This Issue

The retiring editor has taken the liberty of making this issue of the Bulletin a double one and of styling it Numbers 3 and 4 of Volume VII.

Warrant for this procedure lies in part in the fortunate circumstance of having two most excellent papers at hand. Dr. Jackson's paper is not only admirable for its bearings on folk lore in his own special field of religious folk song, but is, moreover, an excellent chapter in American Social history.

Mr. Fink's paper is a new departure among the papers so far published in our pages. It is to be hoped others of the sort will follow, for it suggests many similar studies. Mr. Fink is a banker and business man who has found time for a vigorous interest in local history. Articles have appeared from his pen in the East Tennessee Historical Review from time to time. He has always insisted, when pressed for a contribution to our programs, that he is an historian and not a folklorist. We hope he is now convinced that not only can one be both but that he is such an one.

Book

Many members of the Society have seen Mr. E. G. Rogers little book recently issued under the title, Early Folk Medical Practices in Tennessee, 68 pages, with twelve chapters with such captions as "Training of the Early Doctor," "Midwives and Childbirth," "Practices of Early Surgery," "The Marking of Children," "Paying the Doctor's Bill," and "The Undertaker."

As many will recall Mr. Rogers has from the beginning of our Society been active in its program and in many ways a valuable influence in promoting it. We are pleased with his book and wish for it a wide circulation.

New Editor

The retiring editor wishes to express his gratitude for the cooperation and patient forbearance extended him through five years by the members of the Society. He has happy memories of the five years and a genuinely happy confidence in passing on the Bulletin to the very competent hands of its new editor, Dr. Edwin C. Kirkland.

Money

The attendance at the annual meeting was smaller than in other years. We do not believe this was due to declining interest. However, we have come to depend upon payment of dues at this meeting as a large part of our financial support for the year's work and so in this year we shall have to fall back upon your response to this sort of appeal as a means of getting in the needed money to make possible the publishing of the Bulletin.

Please justify our confidence in your interest by sending your 1942 dollar to Miss Geneva Anderson, Sevierville Road, Maryville.